

Simmons votes against budget

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WASHINGTON -- U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons was one of only nine House Republicans who voted against a fiscal 2005 federal budget blueprint this week, saying it didn't provide enough money for programs important to his district, such as education and veterans' health care.

"We can and should do better," Simmons, R-2nd District, said in a statement Thursday.

The House voted 216-213 late Wednesday to give final approval to the nonbinding budget resolution, which outlines plans for taxes and spending.

Two months ago, Simmons sided with his party in giving preliminary approval to the budget resolution.

James Sullivan and Shaun McNally, two Democrats who hope to challenge Simmons in this fall's election, accused the two-term congressman of changing his vote to appeal to the mostly Democratic voters in the 2nd District.

"Now that we're getting close to the election, he flip-flops and votes against virtually the same budget

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Todd Mitchell
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that he voted for two months ago," said Sullivan, a financial adviser who served two terms on the Norwich City Council.

McNally, a former state representative from Norwich, said Simmons' budget vote was "an election-year scam" to make him appear more independent.

"He thinks he can have it both ways and voters won't notice. He's wrong," McNally said.

Simmons' chief of staff, Todd Mitchell, said the congressman has a record of listening to his constituents and casting independent votes.

"Yesterday's budget vote is just another example of Rob Simmons listening to the veterans, educators and environmentalists who op-

posed the budget," Mitchell said. "It seems partisan individuals are foolishly criticizing Rob Simmons for doing his job and representing the people of the 2nd District."

Since only 25 percent of voters in Simmons' district are Republican, he is one of a dozen Republican House members who are top targets for Democrats in this year's election.

Sullivan and McNally have criticized Simmons, of Stonington, for siding too often with his party. But an analysis in February by the non-partisan Congressional Quarterly magazine shows only two other House Republicans voted with President Bush less often than Simmons in the last session of Congress.